DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 833 FL 015 678

AUTHOR Ruane, Mary
TITLE New Approaches in the Development of Oral Skills.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 8p.; In: New Approaches in the Language Classroom: Coping with Change. Proceedings of the National Modern Languages Convention (2nd, Dublin, Ireland, January 31-February 1, 1986); see FL 015 669.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Classroom Communication; Classroom Techniques; Educational Games; *Educational Strategies; Foreign Countries; *Second Language Instruction; *Speech Skills; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Testing
IDENTIFIERS Ireland

ABSTRACT

With recent developments in assessment and syllabus formats in Ireland, the foreign language classroom has changed considerably, especially in the promotion of oral skills at the upper levels. Differences are found in the variety of classroom activities, with the emphasis now on group activities, and in the organization of learning and student-teacher relationships, with learners functioning more freely, initiating and managing their own activities, resulting in an apparently reduced role for the teacher. The new practices are based on research into the acquisition of second languages that suggests the effectiveness of spontaneous, creative, conversation-like exchanges organized as structured, authentic tasks. Much task-based material for oral skills development has been produced. Materials appropriate for upper-level instruction include problem-solving and thinking games, interpersonal activities, role-plays and simulations, and interpretation activities using visual and sound stimuli. Instructional factors such as learner grouping, selection and grading of task types, the need to minimize "communicative stress," management of feedback, and the role of the teacher require attention. Ultimately, appropriate forms for evaluation of creative, spontaneous language use at the advanced level will have to be developed. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED268833

NEW APPROACHES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL SKILLS

Mary Ruane

University College Dublin

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D.G. Little

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 015 678

Mary Ruane
University College Dublin

NEW APPROACHES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL SKILLS

In keeping with recent developments in assessment and syllabus formats in Ireland the profile of foreign language classrooms has undergone considerable change. With respect to the promotion of oral skills at senior level the change is particularly marked. Insofar as these were taught at all in the past, they were catered for mainly, by means of "free conversation" sessions, open-ended question routines (mostly of the "what-do-you-like-to-do-at-the-weekend?" variety) and were in general, characterised by teacher-initiated and teacher-controlled exchanges. A visitor to a language classroom in the aftermath of recent developments could expect to find changes in the teaching of oral skills at two levels. Firstly, there are differences in terms of the variety of activities engaged in by learners with emphasis now on role-play, games, simulations and other group activities. Secondly, and this may take some getting used to, there are differences in the organisation of learning and in pupil-teacher relationships with learners functioning much more freely, initiating and managing their own activities and with an apparently reduced role for the teacher.

These new practices in the promotion of oral skills have been fed by the development in the last number of years of research into how second/foreign languages are best acquired. Some of the insights from research on what affects good productive use of the language have been outlined recently by Littlewood (1984) and many of them correspond to what teachers feel, intuitively, is likely to work in the classroom. Thus, unsatisfactory results with audio-visual/audio-lingual methods had made it clear for some time that giving time to memory work and structural drills (habit-formation exercises) did not lead to free expression. Better results might be achieved by seeking to provide opportunities for creative, personalised use of language for the purpose of communicating real meanings and messages from the beginning (Littlewood 1981). Equally, Krashen's (1982) controversial views on the importance of comprehensible input and a "silent period" in language acquisition struck chords with many teachers who could see from experience that exposure to language had an influence on ultimate productive ability. Finally, and though as Littlewood (1984 : 97) says, it is an area that is still problematic, the importance of motivational and attitudinal factors is crucial and nowhere more than in the sphere of oral skills, where tension and anxiety levels are likely to be highest.

3 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The problems of providing the means for spontaneous, creative, conversation-like exchanges in the second/foreign language classroom are immense. Recent approaches to methodology (Ur 1981, Klippel 1984) suggest that organizing speaking activities around structured tasks of a simulated or authentic nature, can go some way in providing answers to these problems. The essential feature of a task-based approach to speaking is to provide a basic framework for each activity which will ensure, as Penny Ur says (1983 : 1), that learners speak not for the sake of speaking, but because they have something to say. This implies firstly, the designing of some kind of purpose or overall objective which will be seen as relevant and stimulating by the learners. Secondly, in order to achieve the purpose or objective a way of proceeding has to be defined and this can involve non-linguistic as well as linguistic factors. Lastly, there has to be some kind of outcome, or "pay-off" which can be presented or displayed to other participants and which is the tangible evidence that the purpose has been achieved and the task completed. This structured approach to interaction in the classroom contrasts with the looseness and open-endedness of traditional conversation classes which more often than not meant that discussion never developed, participants dried up and exchanges were unevenly distributed among learners, with some participants or even worse still, the teacher ending up with the dominant role.

In the last few years a considerable amount of task-based material for the development of oral skills has come on the market. A great deal of this material is designed for the teaching of English as a foreign language but the ideas and techniques described can be fairly easily adapted to the teaching of any language (Ur 1981, Maley and Duff 1982, Ladousse 1983, Weiss 1983, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby 1984, Klippel 1984). Given the current dearth of teaching materials specifically adapted to the needs of Irish Senior pupils, these materials will provide invaluable sources of ideas for tasks and activities. Their only limitation lies, in fact, in the quantity and range of the material they offer. Sometimes, finding one's way around the material and locating the right task, for the right group on the right day can be a time-consuming and off-putting prospect. A resource book like <u>Keep talking</u> (Klippel 1984) for example, provides no less than 123 activities with rubrics as diverse as "thinking strategies", "jigsaw tasks" or "values clarification techniques". In order to put some shape on the range of material available, the following is a selection of categories for tasks that would provide a varied programme of work for the new Senior Cycle course:

(a) Problem-solving and thinking games

(b) Interpersonal activities

(c) Playing parts (role-plays and simulations)

(d) Interpreting activities (working with visual and sound stimuli).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(a) Problem-solving and thinking games: Within this category is included a wide range of games and activities which build very much on the information gap as a method of encouraging learners to interact. One participant or set of participants has information that the others are interested in discovering thereby creating the means by which genuine communicative exchanges can take place in order to solve a problem, or provide a solution. A great number of traditional speaking activities can be enormously improved by the simple addition of a genuine gap in knowledge among participants. These activities can include relatively straightforward memory, guessing,word-association or question/answer games involving quite simple responses from the learners (sometimes "yes" or "no" answers will be sufficient) and with little extended use of language or ability to control the discourse required. On the other hand, with more advanced learners they can range to intricate, problem-solving activities - "Desert island", "Rescue", "Group holiday" are good examples (Klippel 1984 : 103-110). Here the completion of the task is organized in groups, where interaction has to be sustained and discourse managed to suit different purposes.

(b) Interpersonal activities: This is a category of spoken tasks which will not suit every situation nor appeal to every teacher. The main source of ideas comes from Moskowitz's (1978) well-known work on humanistic techniques in language-teaching. Basically, the idea is to develop interaction on the basis of the interplay of personality-factors, feelings, wishes and life-experience of participants by allowing a high degree of self-expression and personal implication by learners. By directly engaging their feelings and by allowing them to talk about things that affect them personally it is hoped to make the learners aware of the need to express themselves appropriately. Good examples of these activities are hard to come by and usually it is necessary to adapt them carefully to the needs of each group if they are not to be perceived as silly or worse, invasive. Salut! is one of the rare course-materials to have attempted to provide material in this category and uses questionnaires, flow-charts and quizzes as starting-points for this kind of personalised work.

(c) Playing parts: An entire article could be devoted to the problems and challenges of using role-plays and simulated activities with advanced learners. Because of the considerable difficulties in assessing learner performance in more complex simulated activities, it is unlikely that these will be part of assessment procedures for some time to come (Mitchell 1988). However, insofar as these activities release imagination and energy and allow an immense variety of language to be used in an extended way with everyone having a set role to perform, they are invaluable classroom devices. Good simulations

provide (i) situations with which learners can immediately identify, (ii) a conflict of interest, but one which can be overcome by discussion and (iii) a set of personality types that are likely to interact well with each other. Here is an example of a simulation tied into the life-experience of school-goers and based on the well known Abend in Hamburg/ Sortir à Paris models that have been used in in-service courses:

Situation:

Four journalists have submitted 3 articles on different rock-stars for the musical section of a paper. All of the articles are worth printing but there is only space for one. This is the meeting with the editor.

Role card 1

You are Dave Burgess and your article is on Bruce Springsteen who is due to visit the town for a rock-concert in a month's time. He also has a song in the hit-parade and you feel that, because the paper serves an industrial region with a lot of unemployment and social deprivation, the readers will be able to identify with Springsteen's music and it should be promoted. You would be extremely reluctant to shorten your article.

Role card 2

You are Allen Smith and you have written an article on Michael Jackson who has a song in the current hit-parade. You don't like Michael Jackson who you feel is a lightweight. Your article exposes him and should discourage young people from buying his records. You like intelligent music and you have written an intelligent article, which you are willing to shorten if space is a problem.....

Role card 3 - for two participants

You are Hugh Perrot and Ron de Wit and you are younger than the other journalists - you are both 20. Your joint article is about Nik Kershaw and this is the first major article you have written so you are very keen to have it printed. You think that Nik Kershaw is a less well-known singer than either of the other two and should be promoted. He is much better than Jackson, and Springsteen will get lots of publicity from other sources. Your article has been well-researched and will appeal to younger readers. You are not willing to shorten it.

Role card 4

You are the editor and you have to make a decision on which article will be printed. You have no interest yourself in rock-music. You listen to all the options expressed and then you make a decision which will take into account - space, need to appeal to young people and need to sell as many newspapers as possible.....

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(d) Interpreting: This category differs from the others dealt with so far in allowing more open-ended, freer exchanges to develop. The basic idea consists of using more or less ambiguous visual/sound stimuli as starting-points for discussion. Because the stimuli are open to interpretation and because they are "wordless" they invite comment, reactions, opinions and become exciting tools for creative language work. Excellent suggestions on how different stimuli can be used are to be found in Maley, Duff and Grellet (1980) and in Maley and Duff (1978). The only rule in this kind of work is that there is no correct, right interpretation or answer to any of the stimuli and the emphasis is on exploring and speculating on possible meanings. A wide range of stimuli can be used: photos, paintings, collages, advertisements, picture series, sound sequences, objects, pieces of sculpture etc.

The pedagogic implications of using speaking activities of the kind just described are not being dealt with here. Clearly, they are considerable and will have to be dealt with in the years ahead if basically good practices are to yield the hoped-for results in school-situations. Factors such as the grouping of learners, the selection and grading of task-types, the need to minimise "communicative stress" (Brown and Yule 1983), the management of feedback and the role of the teacher are amongst some of the issues that users of these approaches need help on urgently. Ultimately too, the question of appropriate forms of assessment for creative spontaneous use of language at an advanced level will have to be faced if the new practices are to be fully integrated into teaching programmes.

References:

Brown, G. & Yule, G., 1983: Teaching the Spoken Language. Cambridge University Press.

Klippel, F., 1984: Keep Talking. Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S., 1982: Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Oxford, Pergamon Press.

Ladousse, G., 1983: Speaking Personally. Cambridge University Press.

Littlewood, W., 1981 b: Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction. Cambridge University Press.

Littlewood, W., 1984: Foreign and Second Language Learning. Cambridge University Press.

Maley, A. & Duff, A., 1982: Drama Techniques in Language Learning. Cambridge University Press.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Maley, A., Duff, A., & Grellet, F., 1980: The Mind's Eye. Using Pictures Creatively in Language Learning. Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, R., 1985: The Use of Role Play Tasks in Assessing FL Communicative Performance. The British Journal of Language Teaching 23.

Moskowitz, G., 1978: Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Ur, P., 1981: Discussions that Work. Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P., 1983: The Conversation Class. In S. Holden (ed.), Second Selections from Modern English Teacher, London, Longman.

Weiss, F., 1983: Jeux et Activités Communicatives dans la Classe de Langue. Paris, Hachette.

Wright, A., Betteridge, D., & Buckby, M., 1984: Games for Language Learning. Cambridge University Press.